POL 14 Viet S (488)

Department of State TELEGRAM

EXCISE

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ACTION EA-20

INFO: OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-08 L-04 NSAE-00
NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-12 IO-16 UPW-01
AID-28 RSR-01 /137 W
031508

R 241105Z JUL 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7765
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL DANANG

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Diane Dzenkey DATE 1/26/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 11728

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

KATHMANDU FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: [

REF: A. SAIGON 11403 (LIMDIS) POL 14 Viet S
B. SAIGON 11601
C. SAIGON 11598

1. SUMMARY: [COLLABORATOR OF PRESIDENTIAL CHALLENGER GENERAL MINH, TOLD US JULY 24 [DECIDED NOT TO RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY. THAT [THE RUNNING MATE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE AN QUANG SENATOR VU VAN MAU. THIS TICKET PROBABLY WILL BE ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY JULY 26. [BELIEVES GENERAL MINH WILL NOT MAKE ANY DECISION ABOUT WITHDRAWAL FROM THE RACE UNTIL HE HAS HAD A CHANCE TO JUDGE THE FAIRNESS OF THE AUGUST 29 LOWER HOUSE ELCTIONS. MINH TOLD US HE DOES NOT THINK VPI KY WILL QUALIFY AS A PRESIDENTIAL

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CANDIDATE BECAUSE OF PRESSURE BY THE EXECUTIVE ON PROVINCIAL COUNCILMEN NOT TO ENDORSE HIM AND BECAUSE OF REFUSAL OF PROVINCE CHIEFS TO CERTIFY THE SIGNATURES. [redacted] INDICATED HE HAD BEEN PRESENT AT A MEETING AT THE PALACE THE PREVIOUS EVENING WHEN PRESIDENT THIEU HAD ANNOUNCED HIS TICKET (SINCE MADE PUBLIC) TO TOP GOVERNMENT LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

2. [redacted] TOLD US JULY 24 THAT AT A MEETING WITH PRESIDENTIAL CHALLENGER DUONG VAN MINH AND HIS ADVISORS THE PREVIOUS DAY [redacted] INFORMED GENERAL MINH OF HIS DECISION NOT TO RUN FOR THE VICE PRESIDENCY. b-1 ed

SAID HE AND HIS OTHER YOUNG CATHOLIC COLLEAGUES (HE NAMED DEPUTIES [redacted]) FEEL [redacted] IS TOO YOUNG AND THAT HE WOULD BE BETTER ADVISED TO CONTINUE HIS ACTIVE ROLE IN THE LEGISLATURE RATHER THAN ATTEMPT TO MOVE TO THE RELATIVELY FUNCTIONLESS POSITION OF VICE PRESIDENT. UPON LEARNING [redacted] DECISION, GENERAL MINH INVITED AN QUANG SENATOR VU VAN MAU TO BECOME HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, AND [redacted] BELIEVES MAU IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO ACCEPT. [redacted] NOTED THAT MAU DOES NOT FIT ALL THE CRITERIA GENERAL MINH HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR, SINCE HE IS NOT CATHOLIC AND NOT YOUNG, BUT THAT THE COMBINATION OF SOUTHERNER MINH AND NORTHERNER MAU WILL AT LEAST PROVIDE AN INTERREGIONAL BASIS FOR THE TICKET. [redacted] ALSO NOTED MAU IS WELL-KNOWN AND EXPERIENCED, ESPECIALLY IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. AS FOR A POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTAL VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, [redacted] SAID GENERAL MINH AT ONE TIME WAS CONSIDERING SENATOR HONG SON DONG OF THE CAO DAI RELIGION, BUT NOW IT APPEARS THIS POSITION PROBABLY WILL NOT BE FILLED. [redacted] BELIEVES A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MINH-MAU TICKET WILL PROBABLY BE MADE JULY 26.

3. [redacted] SAID GENERAL MINH FEELS HE HAS AN OBLIGATION TO HIS SUPPORTERS TO RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY. AN DECISION ON WITHDRAWAL FROM THE RACE PROBABLY WILL NOT BE MADE [redacted] UNTIL AFTER GENERAL MINH HAS BEEN ABLE TO JUDGE THE FAIRNESS OF THE AUGUST 29 LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONS. b-1 ed

4. [redacted] DID NOT BELIEVE VP KY WOULD BE ABLE TO QUALIFY AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, EVENTHOUGH HIS SUPPORTERS CLAIM

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THEY HAVE 85 SIGNATURES OF PROVINCIAL COUNCILMEN (100 ARE NECESSARY). [redacted] ASSERTED THERE IS WIDESPREAD PRESSURE ON COUNCILMEN NOT TO SIGN FOR KY, AND PROVINCE CHIEFS ARE REFUSING TO CERTIFY ENDORSEMENTS. [redacted] SAID HE BELIEVED GENERAL MINH COULD DEFEAT THIEU IN A FREE ELECTION, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER KY RUNS, BUT TV CLEARLY IMPLIED HE BELIEVED THE RACE WOULD NOT BE FREE. b-1 ed

5. ON THE CONTROVERSERSIAL QUESTION OF CERTIFICATION OF ENDORSEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE LOWER HOUSE, [redacted] SAID THERE IS A DIFFERENCE OF INTERPRETATION BETWEEN THE TWO HOUSES BECAUSE CHAIRMAN HUYEN OF THE UPPER HOUSE IS CERTIFYING SIGNATURES OF SENATORS FOR MINH WITHOUT REQUIRING THAT THE NAME OF THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE APPEAR ON THE FORM, WHEREAS CHAIRMAN LUONG OF THE LOWER HOUSE HAS BEEN DEMANDING THAT BOTH NAMES APPEAR. LONG HAS ALSO IN THE PAST DEMANDED THAT THE FORM BE SIGNED IN FRONT OF HIM, BUT NOW HAS PROMISED NOT TO REQUIRE THIS. [redacted] OBSERVED THAT THE QUESTION OF CERTIFICATION OF SIGNATURES OF ASSEMBLYMEN IS NOT A MAJOR ISSUE AND HE IS CERTAIN GENERAL MINH WILL BE ABLE TO QUALIFY.

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ACTION EA-20

INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-08 L-04 NSAE-00

NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-12 IO-16 UPW-01

AID-28 RSR-01 /137 W

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R 241105Z JUL 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7766
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
USDEL FRANCE
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AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL DANANG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 11728

6. [redacted] HE HAD BEEN PRESENT AT A MEETING HELD BY PRESIDENT THIEU AT INDEPENDENCE PALACE THE PREVIOUS EVENING (JULY 23) WITH THE CABINET, LEADING GENERALS, AND OTHER TOP OFFICIALS INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY. ON THIS OCCASION THIEU STATED HIS THREE AIMS WERE TO RESOLVE THE WAR, PROMOTE DEMOCRACY, AND REFORM SOCIETY. HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO ACHIEVE THESE AIMS SO FAR, BUT HAD THE CONSOLATION OF HAVING PREVENTED THE COUNTRY FROM FALLING INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS. THIEU THEN STATED THAT HE INTENDED TO RUN FOR REELECTION WITH SENATOR TRAN VAN HUONG AS HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND PRIME MINISTER TRAN THIEN KHIEM AS THE SUPPLEMENTAL VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THIEU SAID A BRIEF ANNOUNCEMENT TO THIS EFFECT WOULD BE MADE THE NEXT DAY. (THIS WAS DONE AND IS REPORTED SEPTEL.)

7. COMMENT: WITH REFERENCE TO [redacted] OPINION THAT GENERAL MINH WILL WAIT UNTIL HE CAN JUDGE THE FAIRNESS OF THE LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONS BEFORE DECIDING ON WHETHER TO CONTINUE THE RACE (PARA 3 ABOVE), WE HAVE NUMEROUS INDICATIONS FROM

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OTHER SOURCES (AND REPORTED SEPARATELY) E.G. REF C, THAT MINH MAY WELL WITHDRAW IF HE SHOULD CONCLUDE KY WAS UNFAIRLY PREVENTED FROM QUALIFYING AS CANDIDATE.
BERGER

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ACTION EA-8

RM/R	REP	AF
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ARA	EUR 5	FE
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3	FBO	AID
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AGR	COM	FRB
INT	LAB	TAR
TR	XMB	AIR 5
ARMY 3	CIA 16	NAVY 5
OSD 34	USIA	NSA 3
		NSC 6

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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EA

POL 14 VIET S

(1495)

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A-115 NO.

CONFIDENTIAL HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State 16

INFO : BANGKOK, CINCPAC FOR POLAD, DANANG, USDEL FRANCE, PHNOM PENH, VIENTIANE

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: July 27, 1971

SUBJECT : General View of the Lower House Elections

REF : A. Saigon A-88, June 22, 1971 POL 14 VIET S
B. Saigon A-98, July 2, 1971 POL 14 VIET S
C. Saigon 10300 (Mission Weekly dated June 29, 1971)
D. Saigon 10991 (Mission Weekly dated July 13, 1971)
E. Saigon 11402

1. SUMMARY: Elections for the new 152-seat Lower House will be held August 29 to replace the 137 Deputies elected October 22, 1967. Interest in the election is high, and there are on the average about nine candidates for each seat. All significant political groups--the administration, political parties and religions--are making attempts to support strong candidates and prospects are that the new Lower House will be more capable, less venal, and more politically active than its predecessor. Although the election is expected to produce a pro-government majority, the administration may find the new House more difficult to work with than the old. The consideration of qualifications of candidates by Local Election Councils showed some tendency to disqualify strongly oppositionist candidates, including notably Ngo Cong Duc, but these decisions are subject to review by the Central Election Council. END SUMMARY.

Background and Legal Framework

2. Lower House elections will be held August 29 for all of the seats in the Lower House of the National Assembly. The new Lower House will have 152 seats, whereas the current House elected October 22, 1967, has 137 seats.

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FORM 4-62 DS-323

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Drafted by: POL:RSThompson:sm 7/26/71

Contents and Classification Approved by: POL:LBAskew

Clearances: POL:JSylvester

3. Lower House members are chosen on the basis of the province or city as a constituency, except that Saigon is divided into three constituencies and Gia Dinh Province into two because of their size. In 1967 there were 44 provinces and six cities, so there were 53 constituencies in all (taking into account the special arrangements for Saigon and Gia Dinh). Since then five new cities have been established, so the 1971 elections will be held in 58 constituencies.

4. Seats for each constituency are allotted on the basis of one for each 50,000 voters, plus an additional seat if the remainder is over 25,000. As in 1967, there are an additional 16 seats reserved in certain provinces for members of ethnic minorities: six for Cambodians, six for Montagnards, two for Chams, and two for Northern Montagnard refugees.

5. The election law as signed provided that persons belonging to these ethnic minorities could run only for these reserved seats. A case was brought to the Supreme Court by a Cham alleging that his equal rights guaranteed by the Constitution were being violated. In a rather tortured decision, the Supreme Court interpreted the provision on ethnic minorities to mean that they were barred from running for additional seats in those provinces where there are reserved seats, but can run anywhere else (Ref B).

6. Further background information is contained in Ref A (the Lower House Election Law) and Ref B (the decree fixing the number of seats per constituency, plus a summary of the election law and a schedule of election events).

General Shape of the Election

7. Vietnamese politicans, particularly those active in political parties, frequently state that the Lower House elections are more important than the Presidential election. This attitude stems in part from the general feeling that President Thieu's victory in the presidential race is a foregone conclusion. In addition, there is a general belief that the experience of the last four years has shown that the Lower House, where all legislation must originate and which can reject Upper House positions with a two-thirds vote, is the more powerful of the two houses. In spite of the poor reputation of the current Lower House, the office of Deputy appears to be very attractive to

Vietnamese politicians. Political parties and factions also want to elect members to the Lower House in order to prove that they do in fact have significant popular support. Reflecting this interest, there were 1404 candidates on the lists posted for the first time July 8. (Ref D reported there were 1298, based on a Ministry of Interior announcement, but the Ministry subsequently revised this figure upward.)

8. Among the candidates are many distinguished individuals. For example, former Deputy Prime Minister Tran Van Tuyen is running in the first constituency of Saigon, as is Minister of Social Welfare Tran Nguon Phieu. Ex-Senator Nguyen Gia Hien, Chairman of the Northern Catholic Greater Solidarity Force, is seeking a seat in Bien Hoa Province, and several other ex-Senators are also running. Several former cabinet ministers are aspiring to become Deputies, such as Vo Long Trieu in Kien Hoa Province.

9. Most incumbents are trying their luck again, sometimes in different constituencies, but because of the poor reputation of the current House only a minority are expected to win reelection. The provincial and municipal council elections brought into those bodies a large infusion of young, vigorous politicans, and many of these are now trying to enter the national political scene by winning a Lower House seat. As usual, many military officers and civil servants are trying their luck.

Probable Nature of the New Lower House

10. Most Vietnamese politicians believe that the new Lower House will have a pro-government majority, along with a strong opposition minority. The opposition would consist of a considerable block of An Quang seats in MR's I and II, plus a few seats for the Unified VNQDD in those same areas, some oppositionists from Saigon and other urban areas, some Hoa Hao of the Nguyen Duy Hinh faction elected in the Delta, and a few other scattered individuals. Among pro-government Deputies we have included those of the Progressive Nationalist Movement, since it is widely believed they will join a pro-government block after the election even though they are presently in the opposition. This analysis based upon past elections may not fully reflect the effect of recent An Quang Buddhist (opposition) efforts to increase their political strength.

11. Only about a third of the members of the current National Assembly are members of any political party. It is expected that the new National Assembly will include larger numbers of party members, and that political parties will play a larger role in the organization and work of the Lower House. It is generally believed that most candidates will need the support of some organization to win, whether that be the administration, a political party, or a religious group.

12. It also seems likely that the level of ability and integrity will be somewhat higher in the new House. It is widely believed that the practice of buying votes in the current House cast discredit not only on the Deputies themselves but also on the Executive which bought the votes and on the political system as a whole. The various groups who will be supporting candidates--political parties, religious groups, the Executive itself--seem to be conscious of the need to put forward candidates with prestige, ability and integrity. Somewhat offsetting this impression is the fact that some discredited but staunchly pro-government Deputies are expected to receive Executive support, such as present ineffective Lower House Chairman Nguyen Ba Luong in Phuoc Long and gold smuggler Nguyen Quang Luyen in Binh Long.

13. Although the new Lower House is expected to have a generally pro-government majority, it probably will not be a rubber-stamp congress. In selecting candidates for Administration support President Thieu will to some extent tend to pick persons who already have some local prestige, influence and backing. He probably will support some candidates from political parties and religious groups which generally favor the Executive but are not controlled by it. Thus, even the candidates favored by the administration will necessarily not owe their position solely to President Thieu, and will have considerable independence of action vis-a-vis the Executive.

Fairness of the Election

14. The administration will probably exert itself to help the prospects of favored candidates and will also probably attempt to bring about the defeat of certain stridently oppositionist incumbents. The three incumbent Deputies disqualified by Local Election Councils (Ref E) were all

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members of the opposition Society Bloc in the Lower House. (Ngo Cong Duc in Vinh Binh, Truong Gia Ky Sanh in Binh Thuan, and Nguyen Van Dau in My Tho City.) However, so far there is no evidence that their disqualification was organized by the government. There is some good evidence (Refs E and F) that the government has deliberately moved in at least some cases to bring about the disqualification of candidates who are related to the People's Front Struggling for Peace and other related leftist groups commonly associated with lawyer Tran Ngoc Lieng and leftist activist (Mrs.) Ngo Ba Thanh. There are also various press allegations that some additional disqualifications were rigged, but most of the disqualifications by the Local Election Councils appear to have been more or less honestly arrived at. In any case, many probably will be reversed by the Central Election Council which considers controversial cases July 25 - August 1 and must announce its decisions by August 4. The administration may make particular efforts to defeat the three Deputies mentioned above (if their disqualification is reversed) plus certain other oppositionists such as Duong Van Ba in Bac Lieu and Duong Van Thuy in Binh Long.

15. In sum, the administration may try to intervene in some races to bring about the defeat of certain oppositionists and to help some pro-government candidates. These actions may engender bad publicity for the GVN. However, at this point we would judge that most of the Lower House races will be conducted with reasonable honesty, and that the results are likely to reflect fairly well the various political forces in the country.

Lower House Election as a Harbinger for the Presidential Election

16. In the view of knowledgeable Vietnamese observers, the results of the Lower House elections and of the Presidential election are likely to be similar: a pro-government majority will probably be elected to the Lower House and President Thieu will probably be reelected. If the Lower House elections were to show a surprising turn of votes toward the opposition, Presidential candidates, President Thieu in particular, would be compelled to review their prospects.

BUNKER

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